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ABSTRACT

The application and selection processes involved in filling a full-time assistant professor position at a small liberal arts college are discussed, as are the results of a survey returned by 64 undergraduate departments that undertook a search for a similar position during the 1995-1996 academic year. The survey involved departments that offered primarily undergraduate psychology degrees. The case study institution made a first-cut of applicants based on academic degree, experience with and perceived interest in teaching undergraduates, perceived "fit" with a small liberal arts college, teaching experience in at least two of the five courses, and a research agenda. In searching for faculty positions, candidates are advised to: ask other new hires and junior faculty how they obtained their jobs, obtain as much information about the institution as possible, make contact with the search committee before the application deadline, and tailor their cover letter to the criteria listed in the position announcement. Additional suggestions for job applicants include: thoroughly prepare for the interview, complete the Ph.D. in a timely manner, obtain prior undergraduate teaching experience in one's area of expertise and demonstrate an eagerness to continue that work, and have a clearly defined research agenda. Appendices include the 10 survey questions and response data. (SW)

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BARAT COLLEGE

Small Liberal Arts College Seeks Assistant Professor

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Poster presented at the One Hundred Fifth Annual Convention of the American Psychological Association, Chicago.

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Small Liberal Arts College Seeks Assistant Professor

The literature reports on the preparation of graduate students as classroom teachers (e.g., Fernald, 1995; Lumsden, Grosslight, Loveland, & Williams, 1988), issues that ease the transition between graduate school and teaching in college (Hettich, Lema-Stern, & Rizzo, 1981; Rheingold, 1994), a model for quality undergraduate teaching (McFadden & Perlman, 1989), and strategies for succeeding in teaching, research, service to the college, and working with students (Dunn & Zaremba, 1997). In addition, Darley and Zanna (1987) offered variety of suggestions pertaining to conducting a job search such as preparing for and conducting visits and completing post-visit activities.

The purposes of this poster are twofold. First, it describes a case study of the application and selection processes that occurred when filling a full-time position in a small liberal arts college. In particular it (a) comments on the background circumstances for the search, (b) discusses the review, selection and interview processes, and (c) presents the successful candidate's perspective. Second, following the suggestion of a reviewer, the poster reports on the results of a survey returned by 64 of 114 undergraduate departments that undertook a search for a similar position during the same (1995-1996) academic year.

I. A Case Study

Background Circumstances

Obtaining permission to hire a third full-time person is a major accomplishment in a small liberal arts college that employs only 36 full-time faculty who are distributed

in 14 departments and 22 majors. The Psychology department was composed of two full-time faculty while sponsoring four majors (Psychology, Human Resources, Art Therapy, Dance Therapy) and advising about 10% of all students. The department wanted a psychologist who could add a health and/or physiology orientation to the existing general/developmental undergraduate program and help establish a health psychology track or interdisciplinary major with our colleagues in the biological sciences. The proposed position was approved by the college's Educational Policies Committee on the basis of its interdisciplinary orientation and the existing strength of the Psychology department.

Review, Selection, and Interview Processes

The selection criteria that were listed in the March 1996 APA Monitor announcement included:

... "a Ph.D. in Psychology by January 1997,"
... "a record of successful teaching of undergraduates,"
... "strong interpersonal skills,"
... "eagerness to work with students and colleagues in a small (730 students) liberal arts college," and
... "a research agenda."

In addition, the announcement (see Appendix A) identified teaching and advising responsibilities and other pertinent information. Table 1 summarizes application information from the 74 individuals whose applications were received by the deadline. Doctoral training specialty area, institution granting degree, and current job setting differed considerably among the applicants. Nearly all complied with the instructions to provide a cover letter, vita, and official transcript. Most applicants provided letters of

reference, although letters were not requested at that time.

At the request of the other search committee members, the two full-time psychology faculty members conducted an initial screening of the applicants. Their "first-cut" selection of 28 applicants (37% of the pool) was based on academic degree, experience with and perceived interest in teaching undergraduates, perceived "fit" with a small liberal arts college, teaching experience in at least two of the five courses, and a research agenda.

In comparison to the 46 rejected applicants, the 28 applicants who made the first-cut tended to have written more about their teaching activities (see Table 2) and tended to have taught a greater number of relevant, advertised courses. The better candidates addressed their teaching experiences and teaching philosophy in their cover letter; some included separate teaching philosophy statements. Interestingly, total years of teaching experience was not significantly different between those who made the first cut and those who did not.

The 28 first-cut applicants were discussed by the entire search committee and were reduced to a "short list" of six. Each of the six individuals was interviewed by telephone by three or more members of the committee; the search committee was composed of four faculty, two students, and the academic dean. The two finalists were invited on campus for a day-long interview. Ultimately, the applicant we hired provided an excellent match to the criteria contained in the announcement.

<u>The Successful Candidate's Perspective</u>

Given the surplus of PhD's to faculty positions, it is imperative that applicants do

as much as they can to set themselves apart from others. All things being equal, the odds of obtaining this job were 1:74. The following helped decrease those odds:

... Ask other "new hires" and "junior faculty" members at both the potential hiring institution and others (perhaps your graduate school classmates) how they obtained their jobs. Note which approaches worked and which did not.

... Obtain as much information about the institution as possible. A college catalog, semester schedule, and admissions materials contain a wealth of information about the department and the college. For example, supplemental information made it apparent that the new Health Psychology courses (see Appendix A) had not been offered before; it did not mention that in the advertisement. Knowledge of this information was noticed by many including the President, Academic Dean, and the Search Committee members.

... Make contact with the Search Committee and/or members of the department before the application deadline. This serves several purposes: (a) they will remember your application when they review it; (b) you can further tailor the application to the position because they will often tell you what they seek; and (c) you can clarify details that are easy to misinterpret from the necessarily short APA Monitor ad.

... Prepare for the interview(s). While experience certainly helps, one gets a good idea of major issues in both the advertisement and in conversations with Search Committee members. One should practice responses to potential questions.

... Read the position announcement carefully and address the specific criteria thoughtfully and honestly in the first page of your cover letter. If your skills or training do not match the position requirements, focus your efforts on another position.

... Because teaching and working with students is the priority in a small college, obtain as much teaching experience as possible, particularly in Introductory Psychology and in your area of expertise.

In summary, view this process as an opportunity to showcase your unique skills; not as another hurdle to cross.

II. Survey Results

A survey was mailed to 114 individuals or departments that had placed a position announcement for an associate or assistant professor in the APA Monitor between September 1995 and June 1996 (see Appendix B). The selection process targeted departments that offered primarily undergraduate psychology degrees. In the three cases where the survey was mistakenly sent to (and returned from) institutions offering doctoral degrees, the survey responses were eliminated from these data. An additional three surveys were returned which indicated that their advertised position had not been filled. Thus, 70 surveys were returned and six were eliminated leaving 64 of 114 (56%) valid surveys. These data are completely independent of the previous case study data.

Demographic Data

The B.A./B.S. degree was the highest offered in 78% of the institutions (n=50) in this survey. Another 9% offered an M.A./M.S. degree (n=6), usually only in one area (e.g., Counseling Psychology). One respondent (2%) offered an A.A. degree, while seven respondents (11%) left this unanswered. Sixty-seven percent (n=43) of the respondents were from private institutions, 31% (n=20) were from public institutions and 2% (n=1) failed to indicate an orientation. The enrollment (head count) was highly variable with M = 3571; (SD = 3594; Range 400 - 15,000). On average, nine full-time and five part-time faculty support 225 Psychology majors. The advertised positions were 88% (n=56) tenure track, 6% (n=4) non-tenure track, and 6% (n=4) left this unanswered.

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Likert Scale Responses

Respondents were asked to rate ten questions on a scale from 1 to 7, where 1=Not Important, 2 and 3 =Somewhat Important, 4=Neutral, 5 and 6=Very Important and 7=Most Important. Due to an editing error, the 4=Neutral was not changed to 4=Important before the surveys were mailed. Although it may be argued that the survey data ratings might be affected by the ambiguity of the term "Neutral" in the context of the other terms provided, there is little evidence that it affected the outcomes. Two respondents (3%) remarked that the term was problematic, but many more respondents simply circled it as their most appropriate response. Table 3 provides a summary of these data. It should be noted that many respondents who responded with an answer of 7 on the first question left the second question blank.

Conclusion

Interpretation of the data produced by the case study and the survey suggests that job applicants applying to teach undergraduates should:

... Thoroughly prepare for the position interview.

... Complete the Ph.D. in a timely manner.

... Obtain prior undergraduate teaching experience in one's area of expertise and demonstrate an eagerness to continue that work.

... Have a clearly defined research agenda.

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Table 1.
Case Study Applicant Characteristics by Total Number of Applicants (n=74), Those Who Made the First Cut (n=28), and Those Not Selected for Further Consideration (n=46).

Degree at Time of Application

	PhD	PsyD	EdD	MA	MS	MEd	MDiv	BS
Total	40	4	2	18	7	1	1	1
FC/NS[1]	16/24	0/4	0/2	8/10	4/3	0/1	0/1	0/1

Number of Lines Addressing Teaching

	0	1-10	11-20	21-30	31-40	41-50	50 or More
Total	4	31	18	8	6	3	4
FC/NS	2/2	5/26	9/9	4/4	4/2	3/0	1/3

Number of Advertised Courses Previously Taught

	General	Abnormal	Physiological	Sub. Abuse	Health
Total	39	7	9	3	3
FC/NS	15/24	3/4	8/1	2/1	3/0

Statement of "Eager to Teach"

	Yes	No
Total	49	25
FC/NS	11/14	17/32

Statement of Research Agenda

	Yes	No
	45	29
	20/25	8/21

Gender of Applicant

	Female	Male
	35	39
	13/22	15/24

[1] *FC = Applicants who made the first cut*
NS = Applicants who were not selected for further consideration.

Table 2.
Means (Standard Deviations) Number of Lines Written About Teaching, Number of Advertised Courses Previously Taught, and Number of Years of Teaching Experience.

Number of Lines Addressing Teaching

	n	Mean	
First Cut	28	21.89 (15.83)	$t(72) = 2.22$, $p < .05$
Not Selected	46	13.65 (15.26)	

Number of Advertised Courses Previously Taught

	n	Mean	
First Cut	28	1.11 (1.17)	$t(72) = 2.72$, $p < .05$
Not Selected	46	0.56 (0.69)	

Years of Teaching Experience

	n	Mean	
First Cut	27	3.96 (1.83)	$t(70) = 1.19$, ns
Not Selected	45	3.29 (2.56)	

Table 3.

Percent Responses to Survey Questions.

1. How important was it that the candidate have completed the Ph.D. *by the time they were hired*?

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Not important	*Somewhat Important*		*Neutral*	*Very Important*		*Most Important*
0%	2%	2%	3%	16%	45%	33%

2. How important was it that the candidate have completed the Ph.D. *within the first year they were hired*?

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Not important	*Somewhat Important*		*Neutral*	*Very Important*		*Most Important*
2%	0%	0%	2%	5%	8%	61%

3. How important was a successful teaching record?

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Not important	*Somewhat Important*		*Neutral*	*Very Important*		*Most Important*
3%	0%	0%	5%	13%	36%	44%

4. How important was it that the applicant have experience in an institution similar in *size* to yours?

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Not important	*Somewhat Important*		*Neutral*	*Very Important*		*Most Important*
14%	11%	9%	22%	34%	8%	2%

5. How important was it that the applicant have experience in an institution similar in *mission* to yours?

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Not important	*Somewhat Important*		*Neutral*	*Very Important*		*Most Important*
14%	13%	9%	13%	39%	11%	2%

6. How important was a successful research record?

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
2%	3%	19%	13%	39%	20%	5%

7. How important was a research agenda, consistent with the position?

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Not important	*Somewhat Important*		*Neutral*	*Very Important*		*Most Important*
6%	8%	9%	16%	22%	30%	9%

8. How important was it that the candidate's specialty area (e.g., Social, Developmental, Biological) matched the advertised position?

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Not important	*Somewhat Important*		*Neutral*	*Very Important*		*Most Important*
2%	2%	3%	0%	3%	27%	64%

9. How important was a demonstrated "eagerness" to work with students?

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Not important	*Somewhat Important*		*Neutral*	*Very Important*		*Most Important*
0%	0%	0%	2%	5%	36%	56%

10. How important was the prestige of graduate institution?

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Not important	*Somewhat Important*		*Neutral*	*Very Important*		*Most Important*
6%	11%	19%	31%	25%	6%	2%

Appendix A.

APA Monitor Advertisement

Barat College Department of Psychology invites applications for a beginning level, tenure track Assistant Professor position to begin August 19, 1996. Candidates must possess a PhD in Psychology, a record of successful teaching of undergraduates, strong interpersonal skills, eagerness to work with students and colleagues in a small (730 students) liberal arts college, and a research agenda. The person will teach seven courses annually (Introductory, Health Psychology, Abnormal, Physiological, and Substance Abuse - some flexibility possible) and share in advising and other responsibilities. The department sponsors majors in Psychology, Human Resources, Art Therapy, and Dance Therapy. Barat is located 30 miles north of Chicago. Send cover letter, vita (including names, addresses & phones of three references), and official transcript by April 10 to: David Throgmorton, PhD, VPAA, Barat College, 700 Westleigh Rd, Lake Forest, IL 60045. Women and minority applicants are encouraged to apply.

Appendix B.
Survey Instrument.

Your Position _____ Number of Majors_____

Name of Your Institution _____

Enrollment (Headcount) _____ Number of Departmental Faculty: *Full Time*_____
*Part Time*_____

Type of Institution: *2-yr.* _____ *Public*_____ Was this a Tenure
4-yr. _____ *Private* ____ Track Position? Y___ N___
Graduate _____ *Highest Degree Offered in Your Dept.* _____

1. How important was it that the candidate have completed the Ph.D. *by the time they were hired*?

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Not important	*Somewhat Important*		*Neutral*	*Very Important*		*Most Important*

2. How important was it that the candidate have completed the Ph.D. *within the first year they were hired*?

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Not important	*Somewhat Important*		*Neutral*	*Very Important*		*Most Important*

3. How important was a successful teaching record?

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Not important	*Somewhat Important*		*Neutral*	*Very Important*		*Most Important*

4. How important was it that the applicant have experience in an institution similar in *size* to yours?

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Not important	*Somewhat Important*		*Neutral*	*Very Important*		*Most Important*

5. How important was it that the applicant have experience in an institution similar in *mission* to yours?

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Not important	*Somewhat Important*		*Neutral*	*Very Important*		*Most Important*

6. How important was a successful research record?

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Not important	*Somewhat Important*		*Neutral*	*Very Important*		*Most Important*

7. How important was a research agenda, consistent with the position?

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Not important	*Somewhat Important*		*Neutral*	*Very Important*		*Most Important*

8. How important was it that the candidate's specialty area (e.g., Social, Developmental, Biological) matched the advertised position?

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Not important	*Somewhat Important*		*Neutral*	*Very Important*		*Most Important*

9. How important was a demonstrated "eagerness" to work with students?

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Not important	*Somewhat Important*		*Neutral*	*Very Important*		*Most Important*

10. How important was the prestige of graduate institution?

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Not important	*Somewhat Important*		*Neutral*	*Very Important*		*Most Important*

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